

The Impact of Stakeholder Participation in Facilitated Staffing



Linda Handorf, BA
Dennis Hefton, BS
Velma Hunter, BA
Richard Nassr, MA
Kent School of Social Work



INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND AND PURPOSE

This study determined the impact that stakeholder participation in facilitated staffing (modeled from the Family Group Conference) had on child custody decisions. Facilitated Staffing is a collaborative decision-making strategy used by Jefferson County DCBS protection and permanency workers when a child is at risk of removal from their home or has been removed on an emergency basis. They are held whether or not family members attend. If consensus is not reached, DCBS makes the final decision.

LITERATURE REVIEW

- There are few controlled studies that evaluate the effectiveness of the Family Group Conference (FGC) (Sundell & Vinnerljung, 2004).
- Until theory and application of the FGC is consistent and well-understood, controlled research as to its effectiveness will have limited utility (Crampton, 2004).
- “When family groups are entrusted in a conference, with the task of planning for their children, they are able in almost all instances to formulate plans that are acceptable to professionals” (Ryburn, 1998). Kin are considered the most valuable resource in child care and protection (Ryburn, 1992).
- Most research in this area is qualitative, consistently showing satisfaction and acceptance among family and other stakeholders using this model in child protection decisions.
- Social workers in Sweden and in the United Kingdom had an overwhelming positive attitude toward Family Group Conferences yet only 42% of them had initiated at least one FGC over an 18 month period (Sundell, Vinnerljung, Ryburn, 2001).



INTRODUCTION

RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND IMPORTANCE TO SOCIAL WORK

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

What effect does the number and type of participants at a facilitated staffing (FS) have on preventing a child from coming into the custody of the Department for Community Based Services (DCBS)? Does the court accept the staffing decision?

What are facilitator and social worker general perceptions of and experiences with the Facilitated Staffing process used in Jefferson County, Kentucky?

IMPORTANCE FOR SOCIAL WORK

This study is important for DCBS because it evaluated this decision-making strategy. Casework and agency decisions may be impacted as a result.



QUANTITATIVE STUDY

METHOD

DESIGN

This study retrospectively examined the relationship between stakeholder participation in a facilitated staffing (FS) and custody recommendations for children at risk for being removed from their current placement

SAMPLE

Management reports of the Facilitated Staffings (N=305) held between January 1, 2004 and June 30, 2004 in Jefferson County, Kentucky. The placements of 518 children were affected by the decisions from these staffings.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

A chart file form was created and completed for each staffing to collect the desired information from the 305 staffing reports.



QUANTITATIVE STUDY

MEASURES

Dependent variable- Custody decision was operationalized (nominal) as DCBS and Non DCBS custody after staffing.

Independent variable- Key stakeholder participants (ratio) were operationalized as the total number of stakeholders present and the number of relatives present.

OTHER VARIABLES OF INTEREST

Child demographics, custody prior to staffing; reason for staffing; and court acceptance of staffing decision.



RESULTS

SAMPLE DESCRIPTION

CHILD DEMOGRAPHICS

Age: ranged from newborn through 17 (Mean 8.36, Std. Dev. 5.425, median 8, mode 1).

Race: AA/Black 55% (n=285), White 40.5% (n=210), Biracial 3.1% (n=16) and all others 1.2% (n=6).

Gender: Male 52.5% (n=272), Female 47.5% (n=246)

Sibling Group Size: One 34.7% (180), Two 27.8% (144),
Three 20.5% (n=105), Four 7.5% (n=39)
Five+ 9.7% (n=50).

Reason for Staffing: Emergency 24.7% (126),
Planned 62.2% (n=322),
Unplanned 11% (n=57), Missing 2.1% (n=11)



RESULTS

KEY STAKEHOLDERS PARTICIPATION

Parent attending (per child)

Mother 55% (n=285) Fathers 29% (n=151)

	# of children	mean	Median	Mode	Std. Dev.	Range
Total Key stakeholders per child	518	5.36	5.00	4	2.86	1-15
Total relatives per child	416	2.72	2.00	1	1.94	1-11

CUSTODY BEFORE AND AFTER STAFFING

	DCBS	Non-DCBS
Custody Prior to Staffing	34.4% (n=178)	65.4% (n=340)
Recommended Custody after Staffing	42.9% (n=222)	57.1% (n=296)



RESULTS

COURT ACCEPTANCE OF STAFFING DECISION

Fully Agreed	61.0% (n = 316)
Agreed with Additional Action Steps	1.5% (n = 6)
No Court Action Recommended	9.5% (n = 49)
Disagreed in Part	6.4% (n = 33)
Disagreed in Whole	1.2% (n = 6)

WHAT EFFECT DOES DOES THE NUMBER AND TYPE OF RELATIVES AT A FS HAVE ON PREVENTING A CHILD FROM COMING INTO THE CUSTODY OF DCBS?

An independent samples T-test was used to determine if significant differences existed between placement outcomes and the number of relatives attending facilitated staffings. Results indicated significant differences existed in placement decisions based on the number of relatives who participated ($t(414) = -2.111$, $p < .035$). The mean number of relatives who attended staffings in which a child was not placed in DCBS custody ($m = 2.89$, $sd = 2.096$) was significantly higher than the mean number of relatives who attended staffings in which a child was placed in DCBS custody ($m = 2.47$, $sd = 1.636$).



RESULTS

WHAT EFFECT DOES DOES THE NUMBER AND TYPE O STAKEHOLDERS AT A FS HAVE ON PREVENTING A CHILD FROM COMING INTO THE CUSTODY OF DCBS?

An independent samples T-test was used to determine if significant differences existed between placement outcomes and the number of stakeholders attending facilitated staffings. Results indicated significant differences existed in placement decisions based on the number of stakeholders who participated ($t(516) = -2.777$, $p < .006$). The mean number of stakeholders who attended staffings in which a child was not placed in DCBS custody ($m = 5.65$, $sd = 2.935$) was significantly higher than the mean number of stakeholders who attended staffings in which a child was placed in DCBS custody ($m = 4.95$, $sd = 2.721$).

DISCUSSION OF QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Our research found that when more stakeholders participate in a staffing there is a reduced likelihood that children will be placed in state custody. This is consistent with Ryburn's assertion that "kin are the most valuable resource in child care and protection". Of the 518 children considered at risk for placement, only 42.9% came into DCBS custody. Lending further support to this process, our research found that the court fully accepted the staffing recommendation 61% of the time.



METHOD FOR QUALITATIVE STUDY

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the facilitator's and social workers' general perception of and experience with the facilitated staffing (FS) process used in Jefferson County, KY?

SAMPLE OF INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FROM INTERVIEW GUIDE

What is your understanding of the philosophy of the facilitated staffing?

Who do you think is important to have as a participant?

What do you think works or doesn't work in the staffing?

What do you like and not like about the staffing?



METHOD

DESIGN

A semi-structured mini-ethnographic interview consisting of 13 questions was presented to the social workers and facilitators to explore their experience and perceptions of the Facilitated Staffing process

SAMPLE SELECTION

Twenty available Protection and Permanency social workers from Jefferson County who had participated in at least two staffings during the period January 1, 2004 through June 30, 2004 were selected. The three facilitators who were functioning in that role during the same time period were also interviewed.

DATA COLLECTION PROCEDURE

Participants were invited and agreed to participate by signing an informed consent document. Two researcher participated in face to face interviews with one conducting the interview and the other recording the answers.

DATA ANALYSIS

The Tesch method of organizing unstructured qualitative data was used to develop themes from the responses to selected questions



RESULTS

What is your understanding of the philosophy behind the facilitated staffing process?

THEME: the theme that emerged had to do with the collaborative process which empowered families and allowed for consensus decision making. Respondents said, it was ‘empowering for families’, it “was collaborative approach for consensus decisions” and it is a “group decision, as opposed to a single worker decision

Who do you think is important to have as a participant in a facilitated staffing and why?

THEME: the theme that emerged was that it was important to have family and community partners present as they are the ones with important information. Responses included, “birth parents (if not there, they have no say—they have their own perspective’ and service providers (they identify reason that they are involved; provide a level of expertise and can suggest other available resources)”.



RESULTS

What do you like about facilitated staffing?

The themes that emerged centered around:

- 1) reduction of burden or stress for the worker,- they said, “it takes the pressure off me”, “provides another level of supervision and support” and “ it is a shared responsibility”.
- 2) preparation for court - responses included it made it “easier for court”, “creates a paper trail of consensus decisions”, and “it smoothes things between CFS and the court system”
- 3) group decision making - respondents said, “it involves the family in it’s own resolution”, “allows everyone to have a say”, and “the agency comes together for a joint decision”.
- 4) staffing produces results –the workers said “(through FS) a relative was found”, “allows agency to show a level of support to the family”, “creates options when (worker) thought they didn’t have any” and “allows for issues to be clarified”.



RESULTS

What do you dislike about Facilitated Staffing?

Themes centered around the following:

- 1) Discomfort during the meeting-“it sometimes places the child in the middle” “makes it uncomfortable when all the information comes out” and “places pressure on me”
- 2) Timely scheduling of the meeting - needed (FS) appointment sooner than one could be offered”

What do you think works?

Themes centered around:

- 1) open dialogue - “everyone is on the same page” and “with good facilitation, everyone says a piece”.
- 2) generation of alternatives - “brainstorming worked” and “you come up with a plan”.
- 3) change of perception -
“you see a family under a different light”, “a perpetrator gets to hear strengths”,and “the family gets to see the workers are interested in the family”



RESULTS

What doesn't work?

The following themes arose:

- 1) Scheduling was identified by many as the central limitation. Workers said “I can’t get an appointment when I need one”, and “scheduling”.
- 2) Issues centering around discomfort for participants in the meeting were identified, including “feeling ganged up on” , “being overburdened”, and the family feeling “ganged up on”
- 3) Several participants stated that everything about FS worked. Their comments included - “it all works”, “there are no changes needed”, and “I can’t think of anything that doesn’t work”



DISCUSSION OF QUALITATIVE STUDY

Generally, the more experience a worker had with facilitated staffings, the more positive they were about the process. Intake and Investigative workers seemed to be more amenable to the process than Ongoing workers. Overall, workers had a good understanding of the function and philosophy of facilitated staffing.

Scheduling issues seemed to be the central concern for workers. Participants noted the difficulty in getting stakeholders to the staffing. The researchers also asked participants: what they look for in an action plan, how often they thought court accepted the staffing recommendation, what qualities a good facilitators should have and, biases that participants bring to a staffing.



SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

It is not clear that every facilitator documented in their chart files (used for our purposes) consistently. This would need to be explored for verification that our data is accurate. DCBS offered no centralized location for storage of hard data, thus the researchers could not verify that the data printouts were correct in the first place. During the qualitative interview process, the researchers discovered that restructuring of the questions may have eliminated some of the redundancy. Finally, considering that FS is a decision-making model that emphasizes family and professional participation, an ethnographic study seeking *their* perceptions of the process would be useful.

Jefferson County may need more facilitators to accommodate the need for timely scheduling. More efforts toward ensuring stakeholder participation may be needed as well.



IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

Our research shows that there is a decreased likelihood of children being placed in state custody when more stakeholders are present at FS. A longitudinal study that examines this relationship and considers other variables such as family demographics, type of abuse, and level of participant involvement would yield meaningful data. It would also be interesting to explore the long term impact of FS, that is; are these same children remaining out of state custody? For those placed in state custody through the FS, are they returning home more quickly?